

U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/988,499  
Amendment dated December 30, 2003  
Reply to OA of September 30, 2003

**AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:**

Amend the specification as follows:

Replace the paragraph beginning on page 17, line 7 with the following rewritten paragraph:

The first pellet feeder 30 and the second pellet feeder 32 placed in the first pellet feeder 30 construct a device for preventing contact. As depicted in FIG. 2, a gap corresponding to region "A" is a space located between first pellet feeder 30 and second pellet feeder 32. The first pellet feeder 30 has an exhaust port 36. The exhaust port 36 is connected to a decompressor 38 which is described later. A pellet feeding passage 40 is constructed as stated above.